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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SHANGHAI 000135

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [CH](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: (C) SHANGHAI SCHOLARS SAY CHINA CANNOT STOP NORTH KOREAN
MISSILE TEST

REF: A) SHANGHAI 73; B) BEIJING 280; C) BEIJING 254; D) BEIJING 302; E) 08 SHANGHAI 422

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Consulate, Shanghai, U.S. Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Shanghai scholars believe North Korea will launch its missile (or satellite) as a means to influence U.S. policy and drive a wedge between the United States and its regional allies. Political normalization with the United States is of paramount importance to North Korea, which prefers one-on-one dialogue with the United States rather than engagement through the Six Party Talks. If Pyongyang has already made a decision to launch its missile, China can do little to stop it, said the scholars. China's credibility as a neutral broker has been marred by a perception that China is using North Korea as a card to improve its own relations with the United States. The North Korean succession issue remains a guessing game. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff spoke with Shanghai scholars in early March about North Korea's planned missile launch and the succession issue. Scholars included Ren Xiao, Associate Dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University; Liu Ming, Deputy Director of the Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS); and Wu Xinbo, Deputy Director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University. The discussions took place before the mid-March visit to China of North Korean Premier Kim Yong-il.

Motives for Missile Launch

¶3. (C) These Shanghai scholars were not surprised by North Korea's recent announcement that it will launch a missile (or satellite) in early April. The launch itself is only a means to an end, said Wu Xinbo of Fudan University. The DPRK "knows" the United States will eventually engage with Pyongyang; the question is when and what kind of dialogue will take place. By playing its missile card, North Korea hopes to a) force the dialogue to take place sooner rather than later; and b) influence U.S. policy towards North Korea in a direction more accommodating to the North, said the scholars. Wu and Ren Xiao see parallels between North Korea's actions now and its missile launch in 1998. North Korea believes its missile launch in 1998

led to a softening of the Clinton Administration's policy towards the DPRK, eventually culminating in then-Secretary of State Albright's visit to Pyongyang, said the scholars. The DPRK is looking for a similar "warming" of relations now that a Democratic administration is in Washington, and hopes a soft approach by the United States would cause a rift between the United States and its regional allies, including the hard-line conservative government of South Korea.

¶4. (C) For the DPRK, political normalization with the United States is of paramount importance, but the North feels it must be able to negotiate with the United States and other regional powers on a more level playing field, said the scholars. The DPRK has a "small nation complex," said Ren. It is a "shrimp among whales" surrounded by big powers (China, Russia, Japan, United States), but does not want to be treated as a small, weak state. Its missile card is one of the few tools at its disposal that it can use to level the playing field. North Korea also prefers one-on-one dialogue with the United States, said Wu, because it feels "isolated" and "weak" in the Six Party Talks (6PT). Though China prefers dialogue through the 6PT mechanism, North Korea feels that all parties in the talks, including China, are "working against" the DPRK. Liu Ming of SASS thinks North Korean military leaders see the current lull in the 6PT as an opportunity to further develop the country's military capability and, by launching a missile, demonstrate to its domestic audience that North Korea is still a "powerful" state. Once engagement through the 6PT or other mechanism restarts, Liu believes North Korea will be more restrained in its provocative behavior.

Satellite or Missile?

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¶5. (C) These scholars were unsure whether North Korea plans to launch a satellite, as it claims, or a missile. They said that China opposes any missile launch but that North Korea could make a legitimate case for launching a satellite as its sovereign right. "If others like Iran can launch satellites, why can't North Korea do the same?" Liu Ming asked rhetorically. Liu thinks the DPRK is trying to display its "transparency," "complying" with international organizations by presenting the coordinates of its "satellite" launch. This semblance of transparency will make it difficult for the international community to coordinate efforts to pressure North Korea, he said. If the DPRK does launch a missile, the scholars do not believe the United States will intercept it since this action would further escalate tension in the region. North Korea will certainly "do something" in retaliation if its missile or satellite is shot down, said Liu.

China Cannot Stop Missile Launch

¶6. (C) Although China still has some leverage over North Korea, the scholars do not think China can pressure North Korea into changing its mind. Once China and the DPRK reach agreement on Chinese food and fuel aid during North Korean Premier Kim Yong-il's visit to China in March, it will be hard for China to renege on this agreement, even if the DPRK eventually fires a missile, said Wu. Liu flatly stated that "the North Koreans will not listen to China." China has already been working through multiple channels to tone down North Korea's fiery rhetoric, such as Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei's visit to North Korea in February, but to little avail, he said. According to Liu, China sent a senior official to Pyongyang in 2006 to dissuade the North from launching a missile that year, but North Korean leader Kim Jong-il (KJI) kept making excuses not to meet the Chinese envoy, saying "there is no use for meeting" and that North Korea had "already made a decision" to launch a missile. Despite official pronouncements of friendship, North Korea does not really trust China, said Wu. He thinks the DPRK feels China is using North Korea as a card to improve its own relations with the United States, further reducing China's role as a neutral broker.

Succession Issue: Anyone's Guess

17. (C) The scholars said no one, except KJI himself, really knows what is going on with the succession issue in the DPRK. Despite recent widespread speculation about KJI's third son, Kim Jong-un, possibly succeeding his father, all such speculation was thrown out of the window when Kim Jong-un did not stand for a legislative position during the recent elections for the Supreme People's Assembly in North Korea. "We are now back to the starting point in the guessing game," said Ren Xiao. Ren thinks none of KJI's sons have the ability or experience to become the country's leader, and he does not see KJI currently making arrangements for any of them to succeed him. He believes a collective leadership, including several of KJI's protigis and family members, is the most likely outcome, in which case KJI "does not have to rush the succession issue." It would take more time to groom and prepare one of his sons for succession, said Ren. Liu concurred that it will take many years for any of KJI's sons to build a political base strong enough to allow him to rule effectively, if chosen. The son "needs to build his own credentials and show he is qualified, or else his power base will be too fragile," said Liu. He believes it is too early to tell if KJI has or has not selected one of his sons to succeed him since KJI is "still healthy and does not want to appoint a successor too quickly." Unlike Ren, however, Liu does not think collective leadership is a likely outcome. Collective leadership may be considered an option during a transitional period, but eventually "a country like North Korea needs one supreme leader," he said.

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